

MAY 13, 2002

NO. 002-137

ATTN: BUSINESS, HEALTH WRITERS

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Doug Porter, Assistant Secretary, Medical Assistance Administration, DSHS, 360-902-7806
Ann Lawrence, Provider Relations Manager, MAA, DSHS, 360-725-1020

Internet helps Washington's doctors and dentists get quick answers on claims, billing, HIPAA changes

OLYMPIA – Medicaid health-care providers can get fast answers to many of their questions through several new Internet pages on the Medical Assistance Administration's web site.

New features include:

General information: New provider relations pages include easily understood answers about provider enrollment, field services unit, Washington state law and Medicaid procedures, as well as hotline numbers and direct e-mail contact with Provider Relations staff.

HIPAA updates: Special pages that explain to providers how the state is implementing the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The federal law is bringing a number of changes to all levels of the health care system, from individual doctors and clinics to hospitals, insurance carriers and public payers like Medicaid.

Electronic claims filing: MAA has developed web-based software so individual providers can dramatically cut the amount of time needed to process claims and speed reimbursements.

"I think all of these improvements can make a big difference for our providers," said Doug Porter, Assistant Secretary for MAA in the Department of Social and Health Services. "I think providers also will be overjoyed to find that with nothing more than a browser, they now can file electronic claims directly to MAA."

The very first batch of new electronic claims came from a Spokane assisted-living facility in April. Porter said they literally cut three weeks of processing time to five minutes.

New Web pages:

Here are the URL addresses for the three new provider sites:

Electronic Claims:

<http://maa.dshs.wa.gov/ecs>

HIPAA:

<http://maa.dshs.wa.gov/dshshipaa/providers.htm>

Provider Relations:

<https://www2.wa.gov/dshs/maa/ProvRel/Index.html>

-more-

“They were clean claims and went right through the system and were turned over for payment,” he said. “What’s more, they reduce our cost from something like \$1 a paper claim to only a few pennies for electronic claims.

Porter said word of the new electronic claims-filing system is spreading slowly but picking up. He said about 15 percent of the state’s 45,000 Medicaid providers currently file paper claims, but that he would like to see the number reduced sharply. Some states have even dropped paper claims entirely, as has the federal Medicare system.

Ann Lawrence, Manager of Provider Relations, said the new Provider Relations web pages began collecting “hits” as quickly as they were posted by the MAA computer technicians. The pages are helping her staff deal with the hundreds of contacts and questions from providers that arrive every day.

After only a few days of posting, the page appears to be generating about 200 e-mails a day. That should reduce some of the up to 500 calls a day that have poured into the Provider Relations Call Center, she said.

“I think a lot of the answers that providers are seeking by telephone are available now on the web page,” Lawrence said, “so it is win-win for all of us – they get faster answers, and we are able to provide better service to the providers who need special attention.”

The third set of special Internet pages for providers deal with the federal HIPAA law. Doctors, dentists, hospitals and health plans must change their computer codes as the nation moves toward a single standard, eliminating the hundreds of incompatible codes used today.

“This move is in the providers’ interests,” said Porter, noting that past practice often meant providers had to keep investing in more and more expensive equipment and software in order to file claims with payers. “Although HIPAA requires change, it will be a better system once we’ve done it.”

The new HIPAA pages on MAA’s Internet site outline the billing and claims forms that are changing, provide information about how the state is complying with HIPAA, including details of an extension that allows more time to prepare for the change. The site also has numerous links to other sites and features an on-line poll that lets providers tell the agency about the preparations they are making. Providers also can e-mail the HIPAA staff with questions.

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Jim Stevenson, Communications Director, MAA, and DSHS (360) 902-7604

NOTE FOR PROVIDERS: Providers who would like to convert from paper claims to electronic filing through the Internet are invited to call Chris Nguyen of MAA Claims Processing at (360) 725-1147 or e-mail him at nguyect@dshs.wa.gov As possible, MAA will arrange on-site visits to help providers and their office staffs convert to the new system.